REVIEWING NONNATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes an overall literature review of non-native English-speaking teachers' professional identity so as to bring forth the issue of "non-native speakership" and to elicit the marginal area of research on this issue. Firstly, it gives an overview description of the definition of "identity" and "professional identity" developed over the years, some related concepts and identity formation process. Then it reviews the empirical works of teacher identity, especially non-native English-speaking teachers' professional identity. These works include research on teachers' perception of their English proficiency, their identity construction and development and their own narrative stories. Subjects of these works range from student teachers, novice teachers and experienced teachers. Finally, it concludes that future research on this issue can still further enrich the current literature by means of wider research confines, more diversified research techniques and subjects as well.

Key Words: Nonnative, English teacher, professional identity

1. Introduction

Till date, the term "identity" still remains a complicated and unclear concept that nonetheless plays a central role in various areas of scientific research. Early statements on identity were influenced by James' theory of Personal "I" and Cooley' s (1902) Looking Glass Self, which stressed individuals' ability to define a system of concepts towards themselves relating to values, attitudes, behavior and roles by individuals. This "reflexive" (Mead, 1934) nature of identity was manifested in terms of "self-perception", "self/selves", "selfhood", or the question of "who am I" (e.g. Goffman, 1959).

These early descriptions of identity had emphasized a stable and fixed nature of identity as well as the shaping of identity. That is, individuals construct their identity through experience, but identity then remains unchanged, or only slightly changes once it is constructed.

Modern manifestations of identity and identity formation, influenced by constructivism, tend to emphasize the dynamic nature of identity and social contexts under which identity is constructed. Beijaard (1995) defined identity as who or what someone is, the various meanings people can attach to themselves, or the meanings attributed by others. Norton (2000) related the concept of identity to "time and space" in which a person understands his or her relationship with the world.

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Common among these definitions and descriptions is that identity is not fixed or static; instead, it is multiple, shifting and in conflict (Varghese, Morgan, Johnson, & Johnson, 2005). In addition, it is not context-free; it is closely related to social, cultural, and political contexts (Duff & Uchida, 1997), since "we encounter and understand ourselves in relation to others, shaped by particular sociocultural contexts and practices" (White & Ding, 2009, p.4).

In educational research, the study of teachers' identity is significant in that it provides a useful lens to examine aspects of teaching and learning (Olsen, 2008). Teacher identity is an ongoing process of individuals' interpretation of themselves and being recognized as teachers in the profession of teaching (Gee, 2001).

Beijaard (2006) argued that this process involves both psychological and sociological aspects. That is, people develop their identity in interaction with other people (sociological perspective), but express their professional identity in their perceptions of "who they are" and "who they want to become" as a result of this interaction (cognitive psychological perspective).

Forming a teaching identity is considered to be a complex and culturally based process, which occurs within a specific context, time, and place within multiple learning institutions (Danielewica, 2001). The process of becoming a teacher develops from the pre-service teacher's understanding and construction of personal knowledge, construction of self, and identity development (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Therefore, the study of teachers' professional identity cannot merely focus on the time one becomes a teacher; instead, it begins long before that.

Seen from literature, many works on teacher identity explore teachers' perceptions of themselves as teachers. Perception, in the cognitive dimension, is the process by which people attach meaning to experiences (Kauchak & Eggen, 2001). Besides "perception" and "self", literature also sees other issues such as "emotion", "reflection" and "agency" to be brought into the investigation of teacher identity.

Emotion enters the discussion of identity as a dimension of the self and a factor that has a bearing on the expression of identity and the shaping of it (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Most researchers believe that teachers' emotions toward particular events affect their identity dramatically. A high level of involvement of emotion in educational reform, for example, affects teacher identity (van Veen, Sleegers & van de Ven, 2005).

Reflection is recognized as a key means by which teachers can become more in tune with their sense of self and with a deep understanding of how this self fits into a larger context which involves others. The role of reflection in teacher identity development has been acknowledged (Larrivee, 2000; Rodgers, 2002) and even is recognized as the very core of effective teaching (Jay, 2003).

Agency is another factor that draws the researcher's (Parkison, 2008; Sfard & Prusak, 2005) attention in investigation of teachers' identity. There are various ways in which teachers can

exercise agency, depending on the goals they pursue and the sources available for reaching their goals (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloopl, 2004).

Metaphor is also examined to describe teacher identity (e.g. Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). In Thomas and Beauchamp's study, they compared metaphors new teachers chose immediately following graduation with those suggested part way through their first year of teaching. The findings suggest that new teachers struggle to develop a professional identity during their first year and the identity development is a gradual, complex and often problematic process.

In language classrooms, due to the deeply rooted notion that the most ideal language teacher is the native speaker (Chomsky, 1968), one factor becomes outstanding among others – the native speakership of the teacher. Differences between native and nonnative language teachers, in terms of student attitudes and pedagogy are often investigated (e.g. Moussu, 2006) and each has its advantages and disadvantages. Collaboration between them is proved to benefit both camps (Tsai, 2007).

Research on nonnative speaking teachers (NNSs) can be traced to Peter Medgyes' pioneering work on this topic, who openly challenged the native/non-native division and identified distinctive features of NNESTs in his book the Non-native Teacher (1994).

Medgyes conducted an international survey to study perceptions of native speaking language teachers and nonnative speaking language teachers in 1994. In this pioneering study, they gave questionnaires to 216 teachers from 10 countries to verify whether native speaking teachers (NSTs) and nonnative speaking teachers (NNSTs) perceive differences in teaching and how their perception influences teaching behaviors.

The objective was to test the hypothesis: NS and NNS English teachers differ in terms of their teaching practice and these differences in teaching practice are mainly due to their differing levels of language proficiency, and their knowledge of these differences affects the NNS teachers' "self-perception and teaching attitudes".

It was found that 68% of the respondents perceived differences between native and nonnative teachers of English in the way they teach and the differences are closely related to their linguistic competencies. This is in agreement with Eslami & Fatahi's (2008) that language proficiency is related to EFL teachers' perceived self-efficacy.

It was concluded that native speaking teachers and non-native speaking teachers are "two different species" and these two "species" differ in terms of language proficiency and teaching practice (behavior). Furthermore, most of these differences in teaching practice can be attributed to variables such as the discrepancy in language proficiency. However, any type of "species" can equally be good teachers regardless of native/nonnative division.

2. Reviewing nonnative English-speaking teachers' professional identity

Medgyes' (1994) study on NNESTs worldwide resulted in a rapid growing literature on NNESTs' identity. Repeatedly researched are their language proficiency, self-perception, pedagogical approach, etc. (e.g. Reis, 2010), as well as the differences between NESTs and NNESTs.

On language proficiency

NNESTs are often found to consider their own language proficiency "inferior" (Tang, 1997) to native speaking teachers in terms of pronunciation, listening, vocabulary and reading. They believe that their English is not as "accurate, correct and natural" as native speakers (p.578). Pronunciation and speaking are the two skills that the NNESTs found most difficult. Less difficult were speaking and vocabulary. Grammar and listening were reported to be relatively easier for NNESTs. (Kamhi-Stein, Aagard, Ching, Paik & Sasser, 2004).

Other factors such as idiomatic expressions (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2008) are reported to be areas that NNESTs need to improve. Even grammar, "normally an area of strength for NNS teachers" (Braine, 1999), is perceived by NNS teachers to be another element of "a low level of accuracy" (Moussu, 2006).

A native-like accent was reported to be the pursuit of many NNS teachers (Jenkins, 2005). Though they did not show a strong dislike in their accent, they would be "very happy", "proud of it", or "flattered" if their accent is "complimented to be native-like" (p. 543).

What is worth mentioning is that a complementary element that affects the perception of proficiency is the length of time spent in English speaking countries. Teachers who spend significant time in English speaking countries are reported to be more confident in their English proficiency (Kamhi-Stein et. al., 2004; Llurda & Huguet, 2003).

Llurda & Huguet (2003), after studying 101 NNS English teachers in Spain, found that the length of time spent in English speaking countries significantly influences teachers' perceptions of their language proficiency. Similar result was presented by Kamhi-Stein et al. (2004), who compared self-perceptions of NS and NNS English teachers teaching from kindergarten through Grade 12. The 32 nonnative teachers were born out of US but 90% of them had lived in the US for more than ten years. Though they admitted that pronunciation and vocabulary skills are their difficulties, they perceived their language skills to be "very good".

Besides length of time spent in English speaking countries, length of experience of being a teacher also influences a teacher's perception of his/her language proficiency. Andrews (1994) conducted a study in Hong Kong to investigate the awareness and knowledge of English grammar and found that those with more than six years' teaching experience expressed more confidence in understanding and applying grammar rules. NNS teachers without long years' experience in English speaking countries, however, did not show as much confidence. They were often

compared unfavorably with native speaking teachers, which "renders a feeling of disempowerment" (Amin, 1997).

Despite the disadvantage of perceived language proficiency of NNESTs, no research has questioned the legitimacy of the NNEST as English teachers. Pasternak & Bailey (2004) explained that "a teacher's target language proficiency is only one element of professionalism" (p.161) and the latter should not be equated with the former, vice versa. This echoed Medgyes' (1994) argument that NSs and NNSs can be equally good teachers regardless of being native or nonnative.

Seen from literature, nonnative English teachers often find their English less competent than native speakers of English (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2008; Moussu, 2006) and lack of influence of western cultures (Maum, 2003). In order to help with NNESTs' English proficiency, it is suggested that special or additional training should be designed for the NNS students, or novice teachers, which would help to increase the future teachers' motivation and self-esteem (Brinton, 2004).

On identity development of student teachers and in-service teachers in teacher preparation/training programs

Since the building of teachers' professional identity, in a large part, begins with teacher preparation program, it is of great necessity to address the research conducted on student teachers in TESOL programs. These student teachers include immigrants and students from non-English-speaking countries. And they later become English teachers, either teaching in English-speaking countries or non-English-speaking countries.

The number of nonnative English speaking students enrolled in TESOL programs in the Inner Circle is growing every year as a result of the escalating demands in English education. According to surveys and estimates (Liu, 1999; Llurda, 2005), the proportion of nonnative teacher trainees in TESOL graduate programs exceeds 35% (40% in Liu's survey and 38% in Llurda's). Empirical research (Liu, 2005; Norton Peirce, 1995) on these teacher trainees, however, is still few and between.

Park (2012) explored a TESOL student's identity transformation after she studies in the TESOL program in the US and a disconnectednesss was highlighted between her experience in China, her TESOL program, and her mentored student teaching experience. The disconnectedness has resulted from her feeling of "linguistic powerlessness" (Park, 2012, p. 133) after she began her TESOL program in the US.

Student teachers' perceptions are frequently examined in terms of their language proficiency and professionalism (e.g. Kessler, 2009). Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) examined 17 non-native English speaking graduate students in a TESOL program in a university in the US for their perceptions of themselves as ELT professionals. Most of these students had taught English at certain levels before coming to the US. After being trained and empowered by this program, these

pre-service teachers "developed a new sense of group identity" (p. 427). The new identity positioned them as agents of change and legitimate language experts.

In teacher preparation programs, "Professionalism" and "proficiency" (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004) are two key issues. For the nonnative English-speaking students, the issue of proficiency became the biggest concern for students themselves and educators as well. Thus arose the issue of whether these NNES students need special or additional training or not.

As the way people view NNESTs "has often been a huge source of justified frustration for well-prepared, highly proficient NNESTs over the years" (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004), some researchers (Brinton, 2004) suggested that TESOL should be tailored to the needs of the NNESs of English, which "would increase the future teachers' motivation and therefore self-esteem". As a matter of fact, many researchers and educators (Flynn & Gulikers, 2001) argued for the necessity of introducing applied linguistics and courses in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and culture into MA TESOL curricula.

Other aspects, such as issues and challenges facing NNES student teachers after graduation are also proposed to be introduced into the curriculum of TESOL alike programs (Fotovatian, 2010; Pavlenko, 2003). Liu (2004) described the difficulty of his struggling to set up his identity as an English teacher in the US. The construction of his identity as a NNS in the US followed the three themes: "puzzlement, endeavor and empowerment" (p. 26 – 32).

Puzzlement, caused by pragmatic incompetence and lack of cultural experience, came first and began to question his former experience of an EL teacher for 10 years in China. What followed was "endeavor" (Liu, 2004, p. 29). The biggest challenge for him at this "endeavor" stage is to balance his dual identities – in the Chinese and in the US communities. After endeavoring to achieve what he called "adaptive cultural transformation", the third step is to be empowered as a nonnative English teacher teaching English in an English-speaking context.

He went on to explain that as a NNS teacher, "the only way to make up for lack of nativeness is be being aware of it" (p. 32). Anyway, it is nearly impossible for nonnative speakers to be as proficient in the target language as native speakers (Medgyes, 1994). So being aware of the nonnativeness and "constantly striving for a higher goal" (Liu, 2004, p.32) in the target language help NNS to empower themselves as NNESTs.

Farrell (2012) called this novice teaching experience "novice-service language teacher development" (p.435). He saw a "gap" between pre-service education and in-service education. The gap had resulted in the challenges the novice teacher may experience from the first day of teaching: lesson planning, lesson delivery, classroom management and identity development.

To summarize, being both "professional" and "proficient" are two critical issues for language teachers, no matter native on nonnative. It is, therefore, essential that the NNSs gain a good

knowledge of the language they teach. In addition, in order to empower themselves as a NNEST, it is equally important that the graduates foresee these identity shocks before going into workplaces.

On NNESTs' own narratives

Taking up nearly 80% (Canagarajah, 2005) of the English teachers all over the world, the NNESTs used to teach only in ESL/EFL contexts, but now they are found to be teaching English in English-speaking countries as well. However, many teachers (Thomas, 1999) claim to have embarrassing moments when known to be teaching English in an English-speaking country! In her autobiographical narrative (1999), Jacinta Thomas, a nonnative English-speaking teacher in the States, tells her story on the first day of class as an English teacher:

… a few minutes later, a young woman sticks her head in, stares at me in confusion, walks outside to check the room number, comes in again and asks: "Is this an English class?"

And, the way she is introduced as a college teacher:

A 95-year-old neighbor of mine, a dear sweet old lady, recently introduced me to her daughter as a college teacher and quickly added "Guess what she teaches?" "What?" her daughter asked. "English. Imagine someone coming from India to teach English here," replied my neighbor with a slight chuckle. (Thomas, 1999, p5 – 6)

Jacinta Thomas is not alone when encountering such dilemmas; Okawa (1995), after experiencing similar moments, claimed that his "initial credibility as a teacher was related to my race" (p.1). Braine (1999) recounted his journey from a teacher in a nonnative English-speaking country, to a graduate student and then a teacher in the US. He described this path as "difficult" and sometimes "traumatic".

Similar experiences narrated by NNS teachers can be found in Braine's editorial book, Non-Native Educators in English Language Teaching (1999), and Teaching English to the world (2005). These two books aim to provide pictures of NNESTs' experience on their way to become a professional in English teaching and offer implications for language teacher preparation. Apart from their "difficult" journey to survive under an English-speaking context, these articles also raise a deeper cause – discrimination in employment.

Braine (1999) argued that there had always been an "unwritten rule – no nonnative speakers need apply" in recruiting ELT teachers. Even native English speakers without teaching qualifications are more preferable than qualified and experienced nonnative speakers (Amin, 2000; Canagarajah, 1999). Phillipson (1992) attributed this discrimination to the "native speaker fallacy" – the notion that the ideal language teacher is the native speaker of that language.

Most NNESTs, in journals and books alike, challenge the "native speaker fallacy" and declare that despite the fact that they are nonnative speakers, they are as proficient (Inba-Lourie, 2005; Piller,

2002). Thus, their credibility in language teaching should not be judged from their race or their native language.

Another anthology edited by Braine is Teaching English to the World (Braine, 2005), which is a follow-up of the previous one, consisting of autobiographies of NNESTs from all over the world. Different from the 1999 anthology, this book focuses on history of ELT in the periphery countries. The authors described "the history of English Language Teaching (ELT) and the English language curriculum of their own countries and placed their autobiographies alongside the histories and curricula" (Braine, 2005).

To sum up, these authors, in addition to presenting autobiographical narratives, put forward sociopolitical concerns for the their unprivileged status as English language teachers due to the discrimination against them, and some even argued that the very fact that nonnative speakers of a language have undergone the process of learning a language makes them better qualified to teach the language than those who are born to it (Braine, 1999).

Literature on NNESTs showed that most non-native teachers, while admitting the disadvantages of being a nonnative teacher in terms of language proficiency, stated that they also had their own strength in teaching English. For example, 32 nonnative English speaking teachers, teaching English in California, admitted, on one hand, that they had some areas of difficulty in English, emphasized, on the other hand, that their multicultural learning environment was perceived to help "broaden the students' awareness of the world"(Kamhi-Stein et. al, 2004).

On students' attitudes

Moussu (2002) surveyed 97 students' preference for their nonnative English teachers. The subjects answered two questionnaires, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the semester. Results showed that students' attitudes towards NNS teachers at end of the semester were not as negative as at the beginning. She also found out that Korean and Chinese students held the most negative attitudes towards their NNS teachers. Preference for NSs was also found in the survey conducted by Lasagabaster & Sierra (2005). About 60.6% of the students surveyed showed their preference for native speakers.

In Wang (2007)'s study carried out in China, students reckoned that Chinese local teachers, as compared to native speaking teachers, are relatively disadvantaged over language skills and cultures.

However, research (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Llurda & Huguet, 2003) also showed that, despite the general preference for native speakers, administrators consider having both a NS and a NNS as the most popular choice when hiring English language teachers. These results were encouraging for students do not show as much negative perception towards NNS as expected. Instead, some research has proved NNS to be welcomed by students.

Liang (2002) investigated 20 ESL students' opinions about 6 ESL teachers at California State University, with only 1 native speaker of English. Quite surprisingly, the results showed that accent does not negatively affect students' attitudes toward the NNESTs.

Ling & Braine (2007) conducted a study, using questionnaires and interviews, in Hong Kong to investigate the attitudes of university students towards their NNS English teachers. The students are found to have a favorable attitude towards their NNS English teachers, though some shortcomings are indicated.

Nevertheless, negative opinions are also found, which mainly center round poorer language proficiency and lack of knowledge about the target culture (Mahboob, 2003; Moussu, 2002). Hence students were found to welcome NSs in the areas of pronunciation, culture and civilization, listening, vocabulary and speaking, whereas in the areas of grammar and strategies, they preferred NNSs (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005).

It is also worth noting that variables such as "students' age (Butler, 2007), first language, class subject, level of English proficiency, grade for the course, and the teachers' country of origin" (Braine, 2010) also play a significant part in affecting students' attitudes. Moussu's (2002) finding that Asian students in general have more negative attitudes towards NNS than students from other areas is a case in point.

To summarize, literature has seen an increasing attention placed on the status of NNESTs and how they perceive and are perceived by others. And the issues discussed seem to have impartible relationships with the dichotomy of native and nonnative for language teachers and thus give rise to many related debates over language teacher and language teaching, such as "are NESTs advantageous over NNESTs in terms of language teaching?" or, "what is the appropriate language teacher model?"

On debates on what is a qualified English teacher

Lying behind these arguments is the question: what is a qualified language teacher? "Native speaker fallacy" (Phillipson, 1992) has entitled native speakers as ideal language teachers, since the language they speak is much more "genuine and original". As a result, being a native speaker sometimes is "the only qualification that many teachers require" (Kirkpatrick, 2008).

In recent literature, however, the glory attached to native speakers has faded and there have been a growing number of ELT professionals who contend that the "ideal teacher" is no longer a category reserved for native speakers (Medgyes, 1994). Medgyes (1994) pointed out that "the more proficient, the more efficient" is a false statement (p. 77) and "being proficient" should not be the only criterion to judge a language teacher's qualification. Pasternak & Bailey (2004) also suggest that proficiency is only an element of professionalism in language teaching.

Other elements such as "awareness of students' negative transfer from their first languages and of the psychological aspects of learning", have been frequently emphasized as NNETS' strength over NESTs (Ellis, 2002; Inbar-Lourie, 2001; Llurda & Huguet, 2003).

Kirkpatrick (2008), from the perspective of world Englishes, affirmed the strengths of local language teachers:

In addition to sharing the linguistic repertoire of their students and being able to exploit this in class, local teachers are also familiar with the educational, social and cultural norms of their students and, importantly, the school system as a whole. They understand the roles expected of them as teachers in their particular culture and how these roles interact with the expected roles of students… (p. 190)

His viewpoint on whether to choose a native speaker or a nonnative speaker as an English teacher mainly lies on different linguistic contexts. The choice of a local model is extremely advantageous in outer-circle English teaching context while native speaker model benefits those who wish to obtain the first-hand knowledge of the culture and manners of the relevant inner-circle countries. No matter native or nonnative, the premise is that they are well trained professionally.

This view is well echoed by Diniz de Figueiredo's (2011) investigation of how NNESTs teach in the US K-12 schools and conclude that teachers' bi/multilingual skills were crucial in defining their identities as unique professionals with cultural sensitivity to students' realities.

3. Conclusion

Literature has shown a prolific variety of research on teacher identity in general, and nonnative English-speaking teachers' professional identity in particular. However, most research (e.g. Fotovatian, 2010; Mahboob, 2003; Sawir, 2005) has been conducted in the inner circle countries[2], with only a small amount (e.g. Adediwura, & Tayo, 2007; Meng & Tajaroensuk, 2013) in outer and expanding settings. To be more specifically, the setting is that nonnative English-speaking teachers are teaching English to both native and nonnative English speakers, with native speakers occupying the majority of the student population.

Considering the literature from the perspective of subjects studied, there are three groups of subjects that are most frequently targeted, namely, NNES teachers, NNES student teachers, and their students. In the study of NNESTs' identity and identity formation, research on novice teachers has an overwhelming amount over experienced teachers.

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[2] The Inner circle countries, according to Kachru's (1992) model of World English Use, refer to the six countries where English is used as the native language: the US, UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa. The outer circle countries refers to those countries that used to be colonies of English-speaking countries such as Singapore. The Expanding countries then refer to those where English is studied as a foreign language, such as China.

Methodologies, too, are rich in that these works adopt various methods to collect and analyze data. Moussu and Llurda (2008) identify five types of research on NNESTs in literature, namely: non-empirical reflections on the nature and conditions of NNS teachers, personal experiences and narratives, surveys, interviews, and, classroom observations (p. 332).

Literature also witnesses a flood-in of modern technological elements in terms of data collection methods. Online interviews and surveys have become popular sources to collect data (e.g. Guerrero Nieto & Meadows, 2015). While modern techniques have undoubtedly brought both efficiency and convenience to us, the reliability of this data collection method is still to be used with caution and some research needs to be carried out to prove its credibility and put forward reliable procedures when collecting data online.

Taking all these into account, there are some implications for future research in this aspect. First, under the circumstance that nonnative speakers of English have outnumbered native speakers by 3 to 1 (Power, 2005), there has been an urgent need for more research and closer examinations on these nonnative teachers' identity in the Expanding Circle, where a large proportion of NNESTs are teaching English. These studies will then enrich literature in this particular circle, and broaden the current understanding of NNESTs' identity beyond the confines of the Inner Circle.

In addition, there has been an increased number of NNESTs from the Outer and Expanding circles, who choose to suspend their teaching in their countries and drop in some training courses in English speaking countries (Inoue & Stracke, 2013). The identity development process of this cohort could be another heated and valuable topic of identity research in the future.

Finally, this work would end by bringing forward the concept of "nonnativeness", sometimes proposed as "nonnative-speakership", or "native-speakerism" (Diniz de Figueiredo, 2011), which, has evidently played an important role in the identity construction and development of the nonnative language teachers. And this issue has brought forth a "side effect" – the power relationships in the field of language education.

However, the author would not, in this paper, argue for or against its legitimacy in the field of language education. His intention is that more studies and examinations into this topic be conducted and presented to all stakeholders of English education for more critical contemplation over this issue.

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